

Main events and activities of Sunday School ministry July 1, 2016 – February 7, 2017

I served as the coordinator of Sunday school ministry until August of 2016 when I left for a maternity leave.

Children's camp "The five great – Me, about Jesus" took place on July 18-22, 2016. Every day the camp had its theme about what Jesus says about himself: "I am the Way, the Bread of Life, Resurrection, Good Shepherd and Light of the World." We tried to unite the Bible class and the games with the daily theme. The theme was chosen with the goal to introduce Jesus through varied stories and events to kids that already knew Jesus and also to those who heard about Him for the first time.

This summer camp was different from the others that children from UM Sunday schools were joined by children who are not attending church. The total number of children was 89. Although, at the beginning we decided on a limit – 60 children, after active registration, the number rapidly grew to the maximum, which, of course, worried the camp director, a lot more than the program director, because it required more from the staff, more care about the camp site, and also the kitchen issues caused some trouble. But God was and is above all – firstly, our brother and sister from the US, Richard and Julie Payne, bought us additional pots, plates and cups, to be enough for all. They also brought a lot of varied materials from the States that were used for the programming. Also, God blessed us with finances so much that we got a surplus to leave for next year's camp.

The camp turned out splendidly – the shepherds were a huge support this year. I have to add that the program was changing frequently, but it was tense and replete, so much that already on the third day the faces of children showed a significant fatigue. It is a great joy that there are children that are coming for several years in a row, and now – taking their friends with them. Also I am happy about the parents who attended the talent show, as well the closing worship.

God blessed us this year with a youth team from Ireland, which was a huge support in many ways. No language barriers between the youth and the children were noticed, quite the opposite – the children practiced speaking in English, playing games and singing in English.

This was as marvelous opportunity to start communication with children through their friends who already attend Sunday school, in hopes that in the next curriculum the friends will be joined by their friends at church.

God was leading us through everything – thanks to God that we could serve together and make the summer brighter for the kids!

Sunday School ministry coordinator – Pastor Vivita Kalniņa

I started serving as the Children's Ministry coordinator in Latvia UMC since November 1, 2016. As since my last service in this position (2012) a long time has passed by, I started with analysis of the current situation and needs by sending out survey for Sunday school teachers and pastors. Based on the received answers we came to a conclusion that Sunday School teachers and pastors (one of the Children's ministry goals is to involve pastors) need to meet monthly by regions.

The first meeting was held on January 14, 2017, at Liepāja UMC:

- we listened to 2 lectures – What to do with children outside of church and How to prepare questions for rehearsal of the Sunday School class the right way. They were led by Tamāra Grīnberga (member of Rīga Second UMC) who is a missionary for the Latvian Children's Christian Education Union and Indra Baumane (a member of a Baptist church in Riga). They shared with visual aids for working with children.
- In the second part of the meeting we offered a 5 year curriculum to help the teachers with work planning:
 - 1) first year – Journey with the Bible
 - 2) second year – Holy Rock
 - 3) third year – God's World in the colors of a rainbow
 - 4) fourth year – Fruits of the Spirit
 - 5) fifth year – Sing praises to the Lord
- we started planning the children's summer camp at Camp Wesley (July 11-16, 2017). Around 70% of congregations were represented this time. The next regional meeting is planned for February 11 at Rīga First UMC, when pastor Jānis Grunte will lead a panel discussion about evolution theory, age of the dinosaurs, UFO, but the second part of the day will be spent planning the summer camp (“Saviors”). Such meetings are planned for every month up until June. I will continue working to:
 - Visit church Sunday schools, as possible, to have a better understanding of the needs of each church and to be able to solve them together, based on common prayers and trust in guidance of God and the Holy Spirit.
 - Involve children and their parents in the Sunday school ministry and activities.
 - Form collaboration projects with teachers and children from Sunday schools of other denominations.
 - Attract more human resources from our congregations to organize a summer camp not only for our Sunday school children, but also an evangelization camp for every child who feels a call to hear the Good News.
 - Support Sunday school teachers in their ministry by organizing the fifth UMC in Latvia Sunday School Conference (fall of 2017).
 - Attract financial resources for the children to have a chance to attend summer camps and to participate in Latvia UMC activities (this year the camp moves to self-financing and, unfortunately, participation cost for one child is quite large taking into account the financial situation of families).

I am grateful for the wonderful ministry to everyone – selfless and passionate youth, teachers, ministry leaders, pastors and all helping hands!

Wishing each day to be filled with God's blessings and grace,
 Sunday School Ministry Coordinator Inese Birzniece